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Commendation, Not Discipline

U.S. Attorney William H. Kennedy has been reprimanded by his superiors in the Justice Department because he did not play Washington's game of hypocrisy in the Nassar Haro case.

He came under fire for his courage and forthrightness in speaking the truth on the record. He confirmed officially what this newspaper already knew from other sources, namely that pressure from the Central Intelligence Agency was preventing the prosecution of Miguel Nassar Haro, former chief of Mexico's Directorate of Federal Security and once a good CIA source, for his involvement in an \$8 million Southern California automobile theft ring.

In Washington's eyes, Mr. Kennedy's offense was that he vouched openly for *The San*

Diego Union's discoveries about Nassar instead of using the time-honored bureaucratic dodge of "leaking" the information. If he had been playing the game, he would have insisted upon something like "a federal official said..." or "an official source confirmed..." That could have been disavowed by the Justice Department and denied by the CIA, which, in the best tradition, has allowed "a senior official" to respond — without attribution, of course — that it was worried about the effect of publicity in the Nassar case upon its Mexican sources.

But Nassar had already resigned from his official position, and the CIA's sensitivities notwithstanding, we cannot see how his prosecution would compro-

mise any present CIA arrangements in Mexico. The revelation might, on the other hand, discourage other Mexican officials from using their offices as a cover for criminal activity in the future.

The beneficial result of Mr. Kennedy's public statement is that the CIA now may be embarrassed into withdrawing its opposition to Nassar's indictment on the car theft charges. State and federal law enforcement officers, who worked for months, and some at mortal risk, to break up the theft ring that victimized 600 San Diego and Orange county car owners, are entitled to no less than that.

Instead of being disciplined, William Kennedy should have been commended for outstanding public service in the Nassar case.